

A Day with God sermon series
Sermon #1 – The Gift of 24 Hours
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Have you ever had one of those days? You know what I'm talking about. The kind of day when you feel like the whole world woke up and decided to make your life miserable. Like everyone else was warned that things were going to go wrong and you didn't get the memo. Leigh and I had one of those days recently. Leigh had to deal with unhelpful sales clerks, a flat tire and leaving her purse at home while I had to fix a bunch of mistakes, like inadvertently erasing the entire church homepage on the web and then accidentally destroying a piece of furniture I was putting together. That someone was me. Other than that, though, it was a great day!

Judith Viorst wrote about one of those days. Her book is called, "Alexander and the Terrible, Horrible, No Good, Very Bad Day." From the moment he wakes up with gum in his hair, things just do not go Alexander's way. At breakfast, Alexander's brothers Nick and Anthony reach into their cereal boxes and pull out amazing prizes, while all Alexander gets when he reaches in his box is...cereal. His teacher doesn't like his drawing of an invisible castle, he loses his yo-yo, there is no dessert in his lunch, the dentist tells him he has a cavity, there is kissing on TV, and he has to wear his railroad train pajamas – and he hates his railroad train pajamas. After deciding he wants to move to Australia, the book ends with Alexander's mother assuring him that everyone has bad days, even people who live in Australia.

We've all had bad days and days much worse than those I've just described. We've had days that started out healthy and ended with a bad diagnosis. Days where we started with a job and ended unemployed. Days that started filled with love but ended filled with grief. We all have had those days.

But have you ever had a really good day, the kind of day that sticks out in your mind? My wedding day is like that for me, as well as the days on which my children were born. My ordination day. October 20, 1923, the day the Reese's Cup was invented. When I think about those days, and then I think about those other days, I'm amazed at the scope of all that can happen in the span of 24 hours. How can we have such amazing days and then such terrible, horrible, no good, very bad days?

We're starting a sermon series today called "Spending the Day with God." Today we'll look at the value of 24 hours and then in the next few weeks work through the day – morning, daytime, and night – to see how we might better be able to be aware of God's presence in our day and how such an awareness can make a difference in how we live beyond Sunday and into the rest of the week.

But let's start with a day. In the very, very beginning of the Bible, the story tells us that God said, "Let there be light," and there was light. Then God separated the light from the darkness, creating day and night. By doing this, God gave us a way to tell time. Before God made light, there was no way of knowing what time it was and existence must have just gone on and on and on, like that movie "Titanic" or a bad sermon. But God created light and gave us the concept of a day, as a separate entity from the night.

The psalmists understood that this creation of the day was an amazing thing to be celebrated. Psalm 84 says to God, "Better is one day in your courts than a thousand

elsewhere.” Psalm 90 asks, “Teach us to number our days aright that we may gain a heart of wisdom.” And then there is the passage we heard from Psalm 119: “This is the day the Lord has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it.”

That’s an interesting little phrase. We know it, we say it, we sing it. But can we live it? Some days are easy to rejoice in – marriage days, ordination days, Reese’s Cup days – but what about flat-tire, gum-in-your-hair, purse-forgetting, no-prize-in-the-cereal days? Surely we’re not supposed to rejoice in those, are we?

I wish this verse read a bit differently. But as Christian author Max Lucado points out, this verse says, “Let us rejoice and be glad IN it,” not “after it” or “in spite of it.” That would make life a lot easier. “This is the day the Lord has made; let us rejoice and be glad when it’s over.” But no, says Lucado. This verse means rejoice in every day. Divorce days, final-exam days, surgery days, tax days. Every day is worthy of our joy.

The paradox is that those no good days are the days when we need God most, yet when God seems furthest away. Or is it that we are furthest away from God? If we don’t make it a practice of spending time with God and thanking God on all the days, then we may struggle to feel God’s presence when we need it most.

In his book, “When the Game Is Over, It All Goes Back in the Box,” John Ortberg quotes Lewis Smedes, who said, “Every square on the calendar is a frame for one episode of my life.” Ortberg says we are all square fillers. I actually keep my yearly calendars, and when I look back through them I’m amazed at how I’ve filled up all the squares with things to do. It makes me feel important, you know? “Look at how busy I am. Look at how much I’m needed.” But I’m not sure I left any room for God in there.

We know sharing our day with God is something we should do, but why don’t we do it? I guess you could blame our increasing busyness. Joan Ryan said we are a nation that shouts at the microwave to hurry up. Time is our most precious commodity and we’re hesitant to give any of it away, even to the Creator of Time. Ortberg makes the point another way when he says, “It’s ironic that the early followers of Jesus could not be stopped by persecution, poverty, prison, or martyrdom. But we’re stunted by something as trivial as too much to do.”

If we’re not careful, we’re going to look up one day and realize just how many days have passed. I’m on day number 13,754. That’s a lot of squares that have been filled up and then Xed out. And what have I done with them? If God were to ask me for an accounting of those squares, would I be able to say to God that I used them wisely and faithfully, not only to serve but to give thanks? How would you account for how you used your days?

Seminary professor Thomas Long says spending a day with God may sound scary or difficult to pull off. But think of not doing it. Imagine reaching the age of seventy, having received more than 25,000 days as a gift from God, and not having given a single one back to him because we’re “too busy.”

I don’t have to tell you each day is a gift. I didn’t understand that when I was younger. I thought my days were unlimited, that they would never end. But I know that’s not true. As we age, as we watch our loved ones age, we realized we have been given a finite amount of time. We’re reminded of that way too often. Each day we live is one less day we have, and it’s up to us how to use it.

The Bureau of Labor Statistics website has a chart for the average hours per day we spend on certain activities. For example, Americans spend an average of 8.5 hours

sleeping, 1.2 hours eating and drinking, 2.6 hours watching television and 3.4 hours working (they must have surveyed a lot of pastors!). The chart is broken down into all ages and ethnicities and geographical locations. But you know the one number that is consistent across the board? When you add up all the numbers in all the columns, you get 24 hours. No more, no less. That's what we've each been given regardless of the size of our house or the model of our car or the way we make a living. No matter how many times we say, "I wish there were more hours in a day!" there's not.

So if we know the time in each day is fixed and we know the number of days we have is limited, what's keeping us from making God more a part of each day? What would happen if in one of our squares we wrote "time with God?" Prayer time or scripture reading or serving somewhere or taking a walk in nature. We'll talk more in the next few weeks about how we can make room for God in each part of our day, but today I simply want to ask: "Have you been glad that you have today? Have you thanked God for it and invited God to spend it with you?"

We are all going to have bad days, days with long lines and bird droppings on our newly washed car. And we'll all have good days, days when we can almost feel the promises of God's peace and wholeness like a soft comforter around us. But no day starts out either way. Each day is a blank square, a gift, and it deserves a chance to be a good day. We no longer have yesterday. We do not yet have tomorrow. What we do have is today, a day that was created for and loaned to us, but that ultimately belongs to God. A day spent with God, regardless of what happens, is a good day. "This is the day the Lord has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it."